

15. La Chasse

(1854)

Julie von Britto
(1813-1887)
arr. William Melton

Britto, Julie von

(born Lemberg, now Lviv in western Ukraine, October 16, 1813; died Graz, July 2 1887)

Britto, who wore several noble surnames in her lifetime (and is listed in different lexicons under Baroni, Britto, or Weber), was born as Julie Baroni-Cavalcabò. Her father was a leading government consultant and her mother an amateur singer who later became the partner and heiress of Mozart's son Franz Xaver Wolfgang. The younger Mozart served as Julie's musical mentor in piano and composition, even shepherding her on her first concert tours. In 1838 Julie married the Jurist, Appellate Court Advisor, and Legislative Commissioner Wilhelm Weber von Webenau and the couple moved to Vienna. A son was born, but Julie's husband died soon thereafter. In 1842 she married the Secretary of the Brazilian Legation, Dr. Johann Alois von Britto, and two further children were born. After her second husband died in 1877 Britto went to live with her sister Laura Pawlikowska in Graz where she died in 1887. Her eldest son Arthur Weber von Webenau was a Counselor to the Austrian Embassy in Constantinople, and her granddaughter Vilma von Webenau (1875-1953) was Arnold Schönberg's first composition student and became a composer in her own right.

A major event in Julie von Britto's life was meeting Robert Schumann in Leipzig and then in Vienna. Their respect for each other's talent was soon evident: Schumann dedicated his *Humoreske*, Op. 20 to Britto and she reciprocated with her *L'Adieu et le Retour. Morceaux de Fantaisie*, Op. 25. Another of the piano works that Britto composed was *La chasse*, which appeared in a festive collection presented to the music-loving Austrian Empress Elisabeth in 1854. Works by ninety-one Austrian composers (from operetta master Franz von Suppè to contrapuntal pedagogue Simon Sechter to critic Eduard Hanslick) were included in manuscript facsimile, all styled to meet the approval of the monarch. In *La chasse* we can appreciate what Schumann praised in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* as Britto's "deep-felt" melodies and "elegant and tender" harmonies.

Text by William Melton